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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on peer tutoring and other experiences that may interest secondary students in careers in special education, and notes the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of such programs. Examples of current programs are given, including a variation which integrates athletes with and without mental retardation. The potential recruitment benefits available through Future Teacher Clubs and similar extra-curricular programs are also discussed. A list of 16 readings on peer tutoring is attached. (PB)

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Peer Tutoring And Other Positive Experiences To Interest Secondary Students In Special Education Careers

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NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR PROFESSIONS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Careers Center/The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia 22091
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Peer Tutoring And Other Positive Experiences

To Interest Secondary Students in Special Education Careers

A STRIKING PERCENTAGE of special education professionals say that their career choices were influenced by early positive experiences with individuals who had disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children, 1988). Among those experiences are: living with a disabled family member, having a friend with a disability, or working with children and youth in school or summer programs. Because knowing and working with people who have disabilities can lead to a career choice in this direction, and because current shortages of special education personnel may be expected to intensify in the future, one long-term recruitment strategy is to provide young people with meaningful and rewarding opportunities to relate to children and youth with special needs. Peer tutoring represents one such opportunity.

Peer tutoring involves one student in the role of "teacher" and another in the role of "learner" (and the two students can exchange these roles, according to their different strengths, weaknesses, talents, and interests). Because there is often resistance to being tutored by a same-age classmate, peer tutoring usually involves tutors at least two years older than their tutees; in cross-age tutoring, students work together on specified activities, and tutors are usually given training (Slavin, 1986).

Peer tutoring not only gives non-disabled students positive experiences, but it also multiplies the instructional resources available for students with special needs. If training, incentives, and collegial experiences are included for peer tutors, their experiences with special education will be enriched, and they can be encouraged (through information on careers and educational requirements) to join one of the professions that serves individuals with disabilities (Smith-Davis & Cohen, 1988). Further, research has shown that peer tutoring enhances the learning of both tutor and tutee (see Jenkins & Jenkins, 1981; Slavin, 1986).

One efficacy study was reported by Jenkins, Mayhall, Peschka, and Jenkins (1974) in an investigation that compared teacher-led small group instruction with individual instruction by cross-age tutors. Subjects were resource room students with mental retardation and learning disabilities (tutees) and regular third and fourth grade students who had received training and tutoring experience. Each subject was his or her own control and received daily instruction in both teacher-led and tutorial conditions. Learning was observed on word recognition, oral reading, spelling, and math facts, and the results showed that the greatest learning occurred in the tutoring situation, whose outcomes exceeded those of teacher-led instruction.

The cost-effectiveness of tutoring, and the benefits to tutors, was reported by Jenkins and Jenkins (1981), referring to a study by Armstrong, Conlon, Pierson, and Stahlbrand (1979), in which high school seniors worked with consulting teachers in tutoring students with disabilities who were not succeeding in the regular curriculum in grades 1 through 4. The high school students tutored for three periods per week over a year, and conferred with the consulting teacher once a week Their tutees gained an average of 1.7 months for each month they were tutored, which was identical to the gain of equivalent students who were tutored by paraprofessionals. However, the expenses related to the use of paraprofessionals were more than three times as high as the expenses involved

in using the high school tutors. Moreover, "the high school students acquired useful teaching, measuring, and managing skills and rated their experience as highly rewarding" (Jenkins & Jenkins, 1981, p. 12).

TUTORING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: CURRENT EXAMPLES

A VOLUNTEER GROUP of 95 students, aged 12 to 18, was trained to work with all levels and ages of children with disabilities in the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas (Foundation for Exceptional Children, 1988). The student volunteers worked as teachers' aides during the summer and school year, acting as assistants in parent programs, counselors for weekend outings and field trips, and providers of respite care. In order to qualify for these activities, students mastered the following (p. 5):

o Became proficient in basic sign language skills. (A two-week sign language class was taught by a teacher who specialized in auditory impairments.)

o Acquired basic techniques and skills as assistants in academic and non-academic settings. (They spent one week in the classroom with a certified teacher and had two days of training for field trips and campouts.)

o Learned appropriate methods and basic terminology for assisting with related services, including occupational, physical, speech, and music therapies; adapted physical education; orientation and mobility techniques. (They completed a one-week training session with therapists, and had on-the-job training.)

o Became able to carry out prescribed home programs for children with disabilities. (Training was directly related to individual children with disabilities where these services were needed.)

The student volunteers' response to this program was extremely positive, and many more requested to be trained and participate than had been expected.

AT THE DYSART UNIFIED SCHOOLS' 1986 Migrant Summer School in Phoenix (Ausberger, 1987), when teachers needed assistance in tutoring students in oral language skills, "they called for a LIRT (Language Instant Relief for Teachers); in response, one of six work-study students from the district's high schools was assigned to come to the classroom on a regular schedule to work independently with individual students" (p. 1). This summer program focused exclusively on language arts skills for migrant students. The LIRTS had volunteered for their roles during the previous year and were selected through interviews.

Every morning the LIRTS spent two hours learning about language and making instructional materials. Each afternoon, they worked individually with students in their classrooms. Each LIRT met the following training objectives (p. 1):

o To name three levels of language development and the learning needed at each level.

o To distinguish between Q-A-E (question-answer-evaluation) interactions and language teaching interactions.

o To "linguistically encode" experiences for students.

o To recognize and modify "high information compression" sentences.

o To use three language teaching methods: drill, interaction, and barrier games.

Each LIRT also constructed a library of basic language development materials for each grade level with which she was associated. "At the close of the five-week summer session, six LIRTS, working with ten different teachers, had helped more than 50 students develop oral language skills. Both teachers and students appreciated the success of the program and commented on its benefits. LIRT Ofelia Dominguez wrote that 'the thing I like best about this program is that we get to be teachers for once'" (Ausberger, 1987, p. 1). With their new skills, the LIRTS continued to assist teachers and students during the following school year.

A VARIATION ON PEER TUTORING is part of a new program in which Special Olympics and several state departments of education have formed a partnership in three pioneer activities that integrate athletes with and without mental retardation (Dinn & Krebs, 1989):

o UNIFIED SPORTS, in which athletes with mental retardation compete on teams with non-disabled athletes as part of the school's intramural and/or interscholastic program.

o SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS, in which athletes with mental retardation train and compete alongside their interscholastic varsity and junior varsity teams.

o PARTNERS CLUBS, which provide a setting through which students without disabilities train students with special needs for sports competition on a regular basis. Partners also spend time together in social and recreational activities.

Such programs are currently being implemented in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Students are integrated as team mates, and non-disabled students serve as trainers and assistant coaches. "Integration can literally change their lives, introducing them to people with disabilities in a context which focuses on abilities, encourages teamwork, and opens new avenues of communication and friendship through common interest in sports, . . . as well as exposure to possible career options in the field of special education" (Dinn & Krebs, 1989, p. 9).

FUTURE TEACHER ACTIVITIES

Future Teacher Clubs, as well as CEC Clubs, at the high school level can offer information, collegiality, role models, and positive experiences to students who are considering career choices. For example, Florida has the largest aggregate of Future Teacher Clubs in the United States and held its second annual statewide conference for student members and teacher sponsors during the 1988-89 school year. Florida professionals at both the district and state levels are involved with these activities to encourage high school students to choose teaching careers. (Graves, 1989). Additional information about Florida's program is available from the Office of Teacher Recruitment and Retention, Florida Department of Education.

IN 1985, THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON sponsored a conference for high school peer tutors, in conjunction with a statewide conference for professionals in special education. The two-day event was supported, in part, by an inservice training grant from the Oregon State Department of Education, and 140 students representing 21 high schools across the state attended. The purposes were to develop the professional roles, skills, and attitudes of non-disabled tutors in terms of their roles as friends, trainers, and advocates; to develop a system of reinforcers to help teachers recruit and maintain high-quality tutors; and to provide career and professional development opportunities to tutors. This early involvement of high school students was expected to increase their interest in careers in special education (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, 1987).

MANY FUTURE TEACHER PROGRAMS appear to focus on attracting students into general education, but modifications could bring about a focus on special education and related services, too. One useful initiative is the first magnet school for students who are interested in teaching careers, operated by the Houston Independent School District (Cohen, Barnett, & Jessee, 1989). In addition to the regular high school requirements, special courses are offered on developing interpersonal skills, multicultural awareness, current issues in education, and other education-related topics. During their senior year, students have paid internships in an elementary school. Similar magnet schools, based on the Houston model, have been developed in Los Angeles, New York City, and Atlanta.

IN WASHINGTON, D.C., nearly half of the public school teachers will reach retirement age by 1993. As one measure for addressing current and future teacher shortages, a new teacher incentive project has begun at Coolidge Senior High School (Sanchez, 1988). At this school within a school, "at least seven years before they can begin classroom careers, . . . freshmen and sophomores have begun an academic adventure that will make most of their high school days a dress rehearsal for teaching" (p. A1).

Potential future teachers are selected from high schools across the District of Columbia; acceptance is based on a 2.5 grade point average, satisfactory completion of an essay about teaching, and an interview. The regular curriculum is supplemented with a sequence of education, speech, computer, and humanities courses. As seniors, the students will complete placements in public schools where they will assist classroom teachers. Supported by foundation funds, this program continues its encouragement after high school graduation. If Coolidge graduates agree to teach at least three years in the District's schools, they are guaranteed financial aid for college (Sanchez, 1988).

AFTER EXAMINING THE LOW NUMBER OF MINORITY STUDENTS entering teaching in Michigan, Eastern Michigan University began to help public schools organize Future Teacher Clubs. A statewide steering committee was established, and approximately 40 clubs were organized in five states. The first annual statewide Future Educator Conference was held in April 1988 for over 300 participants. Of students attending this conference, more than 75 percent were Black and at least 10 percent were Hispanic (SpecialNet, 1988).

A TEACHER CADET program at Bethune-Cookman College involved approximately 25 middle school students and is particularly intended to raise the confidence of Black youngsters, strengthen their academic achievement, and increase their exposure to and interest in higher education and teaching (Southern Education Foundation, Inc., 1988). "The program will draw on the experiences of similar

programs, such as the one at Winthrop College in South Carolina. A survey of former Winthrop teacher cadets now in college found that 44 percent were still interested in teaching as a career" (p. 1). These and other programs are part of a consortium linking traditionally Black colleges in a comprehensive national effort to improve higher education's effectiveness in increasing the supply of Black teachers. The BellSouth Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts have committed $1,750,000 to support this program.

PITTSBURGH HAS INITIATED a program to encourage promising students to become teachers. An information campaign has been established in each high school in the city, and the district has produced a film on teaching careers. Ten to fifteen teachers in each of the district's high schools act as mentors to students who are interested in a teaching career (Cohen, Barnett, & Jessee, 1989).

IN CALIFORNIA, the state's Student NEA is carrying out a new project which shares the rewards of teaching with high school and college students from minority groups. Student NEA members visit schools with high minority populations and explain to student groups the requirements of preparing to become a teacher and how to acquire financial assistance (Holt, 1989). The South Carolina Education Association sponsors a Future Teachers of America program whose activities are designed to interest both middle school and high school students in teaching careers. North Carolina, Georgia, and Texas NEA affiliates have similar programs (Holt, 1989).

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Recruitment activities aimed at capable high school students can have many payoffs. They can create interest and involvement that lead to career choices which will, in turn, help to prevent future shortages of special education personnel. They can offer opportunities that initiate the teacher education process earlier and bring students with commitment and substantial backgrounds into preservice teacher education programs. When these opportunities include peer tutoring with special-needs students, the benefits are extended to children with disabilities in the present, and their participation will help to ensure that future children have qualified teachers who made a conscious, informed decision to enter one of the many careers that special education offers.

> Many policies and practices have been developed to alleviate the problems associated with shortages of bright, well trained teachers and of teachers trained in specific subjects, including raising standards of entry into teacher education programs, expanding the length of such programs, increasing teachers' salaries, improving their working conditions, retraining teachers for areas characterized by teacher shortages, and developing new policies to ease re-entry into the profession for those who have left teaching. However, these policies and practices are apparently not sufficient to attract the best high school graduates to the profession. (The field) must actively recruit talented high school students who are undecided about their career choices. (Cooper, McCabe, & Cassidy, 1989, p. 566)

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READINGS ON PEER TUTORING

Because knowing and working with people who have disabilities can lead young people to a career choice in special education, one long-term recruitment strategy is to provide middle school and high school students with meaningful and rewarding opportunities to relate to children and youth with special needs. Peer tutoring represents one such opportunity. The following publications may be helpful in establishing peer tutoring programs in public and private schools.

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